



National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Safe Communities

Safe Communities Are Good Business: A Message for Business

Safe Communities pay rich dividends to everyone fortunate enough to call them home, including businesses, both large and small. For businesses, Safe Communities mean lower operating costs, less absenteeism due to injury, and healthier, more secure employees. For employees and customers, safety is a vital factor in decisions about where to work and do business. In other words, Safe Communities are just plain good business. That is why businesses are a key component of the Safe Communities concept being promoted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and affiliated groups.

The Safe Communities program addresses traffic-related injuries in the context of the many types of injuries that cost our communities, our businesses, and our citizens so much in terms of resources and heartache. The program is based on two key principles:

A local coalition offers the best means for defining a community's injury problems and tailoring solutions to address them.

A unified, community-based approach to injuries makes the best use of resources.

As caring and involved members of their local communities, businesses have a tremendous stake and an exciting role to play in this new approach to injury prevention.

The Facts About Injuries

Two significant facts show why preventing injuries, particularly those resulting from traffic crashes, is so important for businesses:

Injuries are the leading cause of death for people ages 1 to 44, a range that encompasses the prime of most people's working lives.

Motor vehicle injuries are the number one cause of on-the-job fatalities. Many of which could be prevented through policies relating to issues such as safety belts and alcohol and drug use.

The Economics of Injuries

For businesses, injuries are often even more costly than fatalities and with good reason. For every injury-related death, there are 19 injuries leading to hospitalization and 300 requiring medical attention. Some injuries are fairly minor, taking employees away from their jobs for only a few hours. Others are severe, leading to long-term or permanent disability and requiring years, or sometimes even lifetimes, of treatment and rehabilitation paid for by public or private insurance. The annual economic cost of these injuries is estimated at \$17 billion in medical expenses and over \$150.5 billion in additional economic costs. Businesses bear an enormous share of these costs both as employers and as taxpayers.

The Cost of Injuries to Business

Businesses pay, either directly or indirectly, for injuries not only to their employees, but also to members of employees' families. Businesses provide insurance benefits for employees and their families and time off for employees who must care for injured family members. And businesses pay for injuries in more subtle ways: for the extra time a replacement worker may take to perform an injured worker's duties, for the time required to retrain a disabled worker, and for the time employees spend talking about crashes or injuries involving co-workers or family members. Businesses also pay for the paperwork and administrative costs associated with injuries, whether on or off the job, and whether to an employee or a member of an employee's family.

The following statistics represent some of the most compelling reasons for businesses to be concerned with injury prevention:

Motor vehicle crashes on and off the job cost employers \$55 billion in 1994, up from 53 billion in 1992.

Motor vehicle crashes cost employers almost \$22,000 per crash and \$110,000 per injury.

In 1994, motor vehicle crashes killed an estimated 2,000 people while they were working and injured 323,000. Over half of these injuries caused employees to miss work.

Off-the-job crashes account for 78 percent of the health fringe benefit costs to employers, and if a crash results in injuries, this figure rises to 88 percent.

Motor vehicle crashes cost employers nearly \$9 billion in health and medical expenses and another \$9 billion for sick leave and life or disability insurance for crash victims.

These cost figures stand in marked contrast to the value-added benefits employers can realize from traffic injury prevention programs:

Businesses that implement comprehensive traffic safety programs can expect to save an estimated \$50,000 for every million miles of vehicle travel.

Businesses with family-oriented traffic safety policies that provide employees' families with child safety seats or bicycle helmets realize additional savings. Each

child safety seat is estimated to save employers \$85 and each bicycle helmet \$30.

The Role of Business in Injury Prevention

Businesses have a large stake in injury prevention simply as a matter of economics, but they also have a significant stake in injury prevention as a matter of good citizenship in their communities. Many businesses are already heavily involved in on-the-job injury prevention, and many also support community efforts to address personal and traffic safety. Regardless of a business's current level of injury prevention activity, however, Safe Communities offers an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of those efforts through partnership in a community-based coalition.

Safe Communities: A Model Approach

Safe Communities is a businesslike approach to traffic injury prevention. It is a flexible model, allowing businesses to choose a level of involvement tailored to their needs and resources. For example, your business could choose a role as simple as hosting or providing refreshments for meetings of your Safe Communities Coalition, displaying safety campaign materials in your workplace, or donating prizes for safety contests. Or you could opt for a somewhat more active role by sponsoring a community-wide activity such as a safety belt challenge, offering the services of your research staff for data collection, or providing volunteer staffing for Coalition events. Or you could choose a greater level of commitment by chairing a task force, donating paid advertising time or space, or providing public relations expertise. In turn, a Safe Communities Coalition can offer your businesses links to an established network of health and safety expertise, access to a vast array of information and technical support, and opportunities to forge new links within your local community and to influence local and state traffic safety policy.

In short, the opportunities for business participation in Safe Communities are as varied as the imagination and capabilities of Coalition members. There is a role for every type and size of business partner.

Benefits to Business Partners in Safe Communities

Here are some of the many benefits your business can realize when you participate in a Safe Communities Coalition:

- Better awareness of the business costs of injuries and of ways to decrease these costs

- Stronger injury prevention policies and procedures resulting in fewer injuries and lower costs

- Expert support from injury prevention specialists in the community

- An injury prevention program integrated with similar efforts throughout the community

Partnerships that leverage injury prevention resources of the entire community

Another way to demonstrate concern for employees' families

Reduction of injury to employees and their families as a byproduct of a safer community

A new way to contribute to community well being and solidify a reputation for good citizenship

Locating Safe Communities Partners

There is a good chance that the basic ingredients of a Safe Communities coalition are already present and working in your community. Other Safe Communities partners can be found at the state and national levels.

Local Partners

Many Safe Communities Coalitions are outgrowths or extensions of Community/Corridor Traffic Safety Programs (CTSP's or CCTSP's). These existing programs include a variety of organizations that promote traffic safety. In some communities, C/CTSP's have been active for many years and require only a slight shift of focus to align themselves with the Safe Communities model. Other C/CTSP's need only expand their membership to include additional partners. And some communities need only a catalyst to bring together a new coalition to enact the Safe Communities model.

A phone call to a local law enforcement agency or to the regional branch of your state Department of Transportation or Highway Safety will probably tell you what traffic safety coalitions are already active in your area. Coalitions that are already following the Safe Communities model and those that are moving in that direction will welcome inquiries from new potential partners, since expanded partnerships are one of the hallmarks of the Safe Communities approach. Some of the groups typically represented in Safe Communities Coalitions include:

Local corporations

Small business alliances

Chambers of commerce

Insurance companies

Automobile dealers and repair shops

Taxi and other transportation services

Restaurants and hotels

Hospitals and public health departments

Medical and health service providers

Emergency medical providers

Law enforcement agencies

Local media

Government officials and legislators

Area agency on aging, AARP, etc.

Youth organizations

Military installations

Safety council, Red Cross, etc.

Traffic safety advocacy groups

State Partners

The primary contact for Safe Communities within each state and territory is the office of the Governor's Highway Safety Representative within the state Office of Highway Safety or Department of Transportation. A call to this office will quickly put you in touch with the Safe Communities coordinator for your state and/or local area. Your Safe Communities coordinator can, in turn, provide you with additional information and assistance regarding state and local programs.

Other resources at the state level include your Department of Health, office of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), State Police or Highway Patrol, office of Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and injury prevention directors. These agencies provide access to a tremendous variety of resources for local coalitions. These resources may include injury data for both your state and local area, multi-lingual print and audio-visual educational materials for all ages, guest speakers and workshop leaders, grant funding, and much more.

National Partners

National Partners in Safe Communities include the NHTSA, FHWA, and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC). Others include national issue-oriented groups such as the American Automobile Association (AAA), the National Commission Against Drunk Driving (NCADD), the National SafeKids Coalition, and the National Safety Council. For businesses, however, by far the most important national partner is the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS).

NETS is a public-private partnership made up of many of the nation's leading private sector employers, NHTSA, and other federal agencies involved in injury prevention. Through its national office in Washington, DC and its 27 state offices, NETS provides information, networking, and technical assistance to employers

seeking to promote traffic safety in and throughout the workplace.

The list of potential Safe Communities partners and resources is extensive. Businesses, citizens, and officials from all segments of the community can be enlisted in the cause of injury prevention once they realize that traffic safety is not just a matter of police officers' writing tickets, but of society's commitment of time and resources to bring down the price we all pay for preventable injuries on our roadways. With input from new partners, the Safe Communities Coalitions can devise new ways of addressing the causes and results of these injuries.

Getting Started With Safe Communities

Once you decide you want to play a part in Safe Communities, you can do so in a number of ways. You will probably want to begin by finding out about what kind of traffic safety and injury prevention programs are already under way at the local level. You will also want to get in touch with the NETS to learn more about the benefits of traffic injury prevention and about other businesses in your area that may already be involved in traffic safety.

Finding Local Coalitions and Programs

The public affairs or education officers of local law enforcement or injury prevention organizations will probably be able to tell you whether a Safe Communities Coalition has been or is being formed in your community. If so, you just need to get in touch with the organizers and ask to be notified of the next meeting.

Forming a Safe Communities Coalition

If you are unable to locate a Safe Communities Coalition, and you want to organize one, try to contact other local coalitions, such as SafeKids to find out whether others in your area are aware of or interested in Safe Communities. These groups are excellent prospects to join you in forming the nucleus of a Safe Communities Coalition. Try to find a partner who will assist in organizing a meeting of potential coalition members.

At the introductory meeting, have a guest speaker to spark a discussion of how a Safe Communities approach can enhance the effectiveness of all injury prevention groups. If you prefer to leave the organizational details to a group that is already working in the injury prevention arena, your business can provide vital start-up assistance to a Safe Communities Coalition by printing and mailing invitations, hosting a meeting, providing refreshments, or providing other logistical support.

Supporting a Safe Communities Coalition

Businesses such as insurance and transportation companies have played key roles in establishing community injury prevention coalitions. Often, a little public relations knowledge is the catalyst required to bring key groups to the table and keep them coming back until a coalition forms. Sometimes, businesses hesitate to get involved with nonprofit groups out of concern that the business will be used only as a source of funds. The solution is for a business to spell out its level of

commitment and available resources from the beginning.

In addition, businesses need to be creative in thinking of nonmonetary resources they can bring to the Safe Communities effort to ensure their role as integral partners, rather than as deep pockets. For example, one essential nonmonetary resource businesses may be able to provide is expertise in strategic planning. Such assistance may be vitally important to a fledgling coalition as it formulates its vision, mission, goals, and agenda. A business can make an invaluable contribution by providing staff to assist with this essential task.

Other resources businesses can contribute include employee volunteers, phone banks or toll-free phone lines, research and data processing expertise and equipment, and a ready audience for traffic safety injury prevention messages. Yet another resource, which businesses may be able to make available, depending on confidentiality and security concerns, is data about employee injuries and associated costs. In short, businesses need to educate potential partners about what they are able to contribute to a coalition, and all partners need to be creative in thinking of other nonmonetary means of support businesses can bring to a coalition.

Benefiting From a Safe Communities Coalition

As Safe Communities partners, businesses not only support local Coalitions, but also benefit from their varied resources. For example, the comprehensive injury and cost databases developed by Coalitions can help businesses accomplish several key injury prevention objectives:

- Identifying the traffic safety challenges that most affect a particular business's bottom line

- Formulating compelling business reasons to enlist senior-management support for traffic safety activities

- Providing empirical data for evaluating the effectiveness of specific traffic safety interventions

In addition, the diverse membership of a Coalition can support and enhance a business's traffic safety activities in many ways:

- Providing expertise and support materials for employee campaigns

- Lending objectivity and credibility to traffic safety information

- Leveraging business's impact upon community traffic safety

- Fostering new ties with other organizations

- Supporting joint efforts such as safety belt challenges, rides for impaired drivers, car safety seat donation for low-income families, and holiday impaired driving awareness campaigns

Finally, participation in Safe Communities can enhance a business's reputation for altruism and good community stewardship.

About the Author

Cynthia Lyle, Ed.D, has worked in the field of traffic safety at USAA Insurance for the past 8 years. She oversees four DRIVE SMART community traffic safety programs founded by USAA. She also has a particular interest in workplace traffic safety programs and is involved in NETS. She holds a B.A. from Rice University, an M.A. from Boston College, and a doctorate in educational psychology from Texas Tech University.

